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ABSTRACT

Some of the problem in the evaluation of presidential leadership are discussed in this speech from the president's viewpoint. It is noted that often there is a close and positive relationship between the quality of an institution and the success of its leadership. Some reservations are addressed about certain aspects of the presidential evaluation process. They include: (1) control of the process and expeditious conclusion; (2) institution of term appointments and limitations of terms; (3) periodic study leaves; (4) options available for former presidents; (5) salary; and (6) dismissal. (LBH)

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EVALUATION, DISMISSAL, AND RETENTION OF PRESIDENTS

OR

REFLECTIONS ON FISHING BY A FISH

Robert W. MacVittie, President
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[Address given to the Association of College and University Trustees, Pennsylvania, Fall Conference. Clarion, Pennsylvania. October 22, 1976]

The title of this address has no real relationship to what I intend to say. It does, however, suggest that a manual on fishing might read differently if it were written from a fish's viewpoint! So, too, remarks by a president about your theme!

I have for some time been interested in and committed to a serious concern about the practices which are noted in your conference theme, "Hiring, Evaluation, and Dismissal of Presidents." However, you omitted a vital personnel need -- Retention! A college or university is a different entity. One not always understood by the public or even some of its trustees. Good personnel practices have positive benefits for colleges and universities, especially as applied to Presidents.

Those in this room who are trustees are generally aware of their responsibilities. In the United States, the historical role of the trustee usually included the holding of the charter of the institution, establishing the overall policy, the selection of the chief executive officer, supervision of the raising of funds, approval of the budget, and representation of the institution with its many publics. Indeed, trustees recognize that the selection of the chief administrative officer for a college or university ranks extremely high among those important decisions required by membership on the board. Many believe it to be the most important decision!

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Dr. Ordway Tead[1] has indicated that:

> "Trustees are, of course, in the last analysis, holding the operation of education in trust as a public service. Every college...is required to gain and hold public confidence. To do this means a two-way relationship and trust. The wider public has to realize that for it to perform its unique mission the college must have its own special degree of freedom, of elbow room, of leisure, and the absence of influence from outside pressures."

I believe trustees are attracted to the position because they believe in the value of an education and feel a willingness to uphold the public trust and more. Burns's[2] general pleas:

> "...for understanding of, intimacy with, and affection for one's institution first and all higher education second, is reasonable for all trustees who seek success for their efforts, and satisfaction for their desires in aiding and assisting as board members."

In a system of higher education, such as Pennsylvania and New York, it is essential that local trustees nurture "their college" because that is what it is, your college. You know best; better than you know any other college or system as a whole. You have awesome responsibilities for the development and success of your college or university. Your stewardship is more easily effective if you choose a capable president -- and help him/her to function well without unnecessary intrusion by you into the administrative process.

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[1] Tead, Ordway. Trustees, Teachers, Students--Their Role in Higher Education. University of Utah Press, Salt Lake City, 1955. pp. 23-24.

[2] Burns, Gerald P. Trustees in Higher Education. Independent College Funds of America, New York, 1966. p. 35.

Even though the selection of a president is a crucial job, it seems to be done. I do not intend to try to improve on the research and writing of Joseph P. Kaufman,[1] whose booklet, The Selection of College and University Presidents, is an excellent treatise on the subject.

I am impressed, too, with the work of G. Lester Anderson, formerly Professor of Higher Education and Director of the Center for the Study of Higher Education, The Pennsylvania State University, in his monograph, The Evaluation of Academic Administrators: Principles, Processes, and Outcomes, which was prepared for the Council of Presidents of the Pennsylvania Colleges and Universities. It is comprehensive. It is cogent. It is provocative and could serve as a catalyst for presidents' and trustees' discussion on the subject. I do not intend to duplicate this study.

Now that I've informed you what I am not going to do -- the obvious question -- having eliminated two of three parts of your conference theme -- are you going to talk about presidential dismissal? The answer is -- NO! Seriously, I shall talk about some of my concerns about the evaluation of presidential leadership with a few comments about the separation from the presidency process, but not in the depth to which the topics have been treated by others.

It is, of course, necessary for trustees to look for leadership to the chairman of the board. The board must, in turn, depend upon the chief executive officer whom it selects to preside over the institution and to lead it toward the fulfillment of its objectives. There are a good many who believe that the operation of American higher education strongly supports a belief that no college or university has made important progress except under the leadership of an outstanding chief executive officer. There are some who would argue that there is a close and positive relationship between the quality of the institution and the success of the leadership.

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[1] Association of American Colleges, 1974.

Many colleges and universities are experiencing increased difficulty in attracting and holding able persons to serve as chief administrative officers. The individuals who remain in such positions stand virtually unanimous in the opinion that their role has become more difficult and more demanding. Trustees depend upon effective leadership provided by the chief administrative officer. Indeed, the board takes seriously its responsibilities for the development of effective policy. If the executive officer is key to board policy implementation and institutional operation, it must give some attention to the need to evaluate the effectiveness of the leadership provided by the chief executive officer. Good policy can be administered badly, with serious consequences

Chief executive officers of institutions of higher education bear an enormous responsibility for leadership. The pressure of leadership in critical times inevitably takes its toll on individuals and on institutions. It can be argued that leadership styles vary and some styles are more appropriate to provide leadership in the excitement of growing and emerging institutions and programs. It may also be argued that it takes an entirely different kind of leadership to provide good stewardship in periods of shrinking enrollments and fiscal constraints Thus, changing missions and social context argue for a continuous assessment of administrative leadership and, particularly, a systematic one.

I believe in established criteria for evaluation of leadership. Some disagree. There must be areas of focus where leadership assumes a responsibility, or else to what is successful achievement measured!

Cohen and March,[1] in their recent book, Leadership and Ambiguity: The American College President, have this to say about evaluations:

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[1] Cohen, M.D., and J. G. March. Leadership and Ambiguity: The American College President. Central report prepared for The Carnegie Commission, New York, McGraw-Hill Book Company. 1974. pp. 228.

> "...we need to reconsider evaluation. As nearly as we can determine, there is nothing in a formal theory of evaluation that requires that criteria be specified in advance. In particular, the evaluation of social experiments need not be in terms of the degree to which they fulfilled our prior expectations. Rather, we can examine what they did in terms of what we now believe to be important. The prior specification of criteria and prior specification of evaluation procedures that depend upon such criteria are common presumptions in contemporary social policy making."

I accept the assumptions as a need! Cohen and March also suggest that "the administrator discovers that a wide assortment of factors outside his control are capable of overwhelming the impact on the actions he may take." This is so obviously true.

The criteria of success in academic administration, as seen by Cohen and March, are sometimes moderately clear, but the relatively precise measures of college health tend neither to be stable over time nor to be critically sensitive to presidential action. Cohen and March suggest that:

> "During the post-World War II years in American colleges, it was conventional to value growth and to attribute growth to the creative activities of administrative leaders. They point out that rapid expansion of higher education, which related to complex attitudes of students and faculty, massive extension of governmental subsidies, were not the simple consequences of decisions of college or university presidents. Nor, retrospectively, does it seem plausible to attribute major control over these events to college administrators."

Too frequently control is, however, expected. Some liken the running of a college to running a railroad. An unknown author is credited for the following:

MY JOB

It's not my place
To run the train
The whistle I can't blow!

It's not my place
To say how far
The train's allowed to go!

It's not my place
To shoot off steam
Or even clang the bell!

BUT -- let the damn thing
Jump the track
And see who catches Hell!!

Leadership expectations are not unreasonable! They must, however, be stated. If the expectations of leadership are not discussed and known, how can they be evaluated? How can you ascribe success or failure?

The main function of the president is to preside over the institution and to lead it toward the fulfillment of its objectives. This may sound like a simple task, but those of you in this room know that it is completely complex. Gerald Burns[1] points out that the president is concerned with many publics. He says:

> "The essential operations of the president are concerned with people. He works for the board, through his administrators, with the faculty, to educate the students. Those four groups constitute his interacting publics.

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[1] Ibid. pp. 51.

> There are other identifiable individuals and groups with which he must deal to a lesser extent, e.g., alumni, parents, donors, legislators, accrediting bodies, supervisory bodies, professional associations and unions, and friends of the institution."

There is a distinct advantage in a system-wide agreement for policy in the evaluation of presidential leadership of colleges and universities. It seems sensible if all other personnel policies and procedures are fairly uniform, that guidelines for evaluation of presidential leadership are needed, too. However, I believe the evaluation process must recognize the local campus needs, and the unique (and successful) leadership style of a president. Board guidelines allow for local utilization in a meaningful and personal way.

I have reviewed several policies and procedures for the evaluation of college and university presidents, including those developed for your colleges and universities. I've served on the SUNY Committee which developed policies and procedures for the State University of New York system. I've done research and writing on the topic of conditions of employment of college and university presidents for the American Association of State Colleges and Universities. Let me now express some reservations about certain aspects of the presidential evaluation process which I have reached.

1. Control of the Process and Expeditious Conclusion

I believe it to be of the utmost importance that the local trustees retain major control of the evaluation process from the point of instigation through the conduct of the review and the conclusion of the process. Consultation to obtain constituent viewpoints is essential and appropriate, but the procedures for consultation must be determined by the governing board. A trustee chairperson should seriously consider chairing the evaluation committee, or at least insist that the committee be chaired by a trustee. There needs to be serious attention given to the assignment of clerical services, since confidentiality applies here, particularly.

It is urgent that all parties to the evaluation process observe the proprieties appropriate to a dignified and professional evaluation with great emphasis placed upon preserving confidentiality throughout the process. Considering a natural inclination to rumor and anxiety, as time runs on, a premium should be put on completing each evaluation expeditiously. It must be recognized that some groups and people may "jump the gun" through use of opinionaires, letters to editors, votes of no confidence, or whatever. Do not be shaken or swayed in your professional efforts. Be secure in knowing that you, as trustees, have the authority and control the process. You must expect to report to campus constituencies, so give the content and means of reporting careful attention.

2. Institution of Term Appointments and Limitation of Terms

I believe in term appointments for presidents. It seems appropriate that the initial term be of five years' duration with evaluation beginning at the end of the fourth year. The establishment of a length of term serves as a reminder that an assessment will be made within a reasonable period of time to allow for one's adjustment to a campus, identifying what can be done immediately, and projecting that which will take more time.

I strongly favor renewable terms for presidents without any limitation of number. I am prejudiced against arbitrary requirements which mandate a career change, be it established by chronological age or by limiting service to two terms of five or six years for a total of ten or twelve years. How ridiculous! I believe established and arbitrary limitations of terms will (1) seriously limit the quality and quantity of applicants for presidential positions; (2) almost mandate local (internal) candidates who may have a place to go at the end of the term; and (3) cut off effective presidential leadership at a wrong time. Often experienced people get better, not just older or less effective. Evaluation procedures accompanied by predetermined limitation of service are incompatible.

3. Periodic Study Leaves

I do not believe that professional study leaves should be used only for retraining or for what can be interpreted as a reward for good service. A study leave for presidents should be available for varying periods of time from two months (summer) and up to a year at full pay to permit study and travel. The opportunity for the president to gain new perspectives on the institution he/she serves, professional renewal of leadership commitments, and the professional contributions (research/publication), as well as individual and professional stimulation is a positive investment. Faculty have a right to sabbaticals for similar reasons. Sick leaves are usually available to all. Why limit leaves for healthy presidents who may even need and use the leave for greater benefit to the total institution? Do not limit leaves to a need to re-educate a president for some other job.

4. Options Available for Former Presidents

If a president retires, the rank of emeritus is usually granted with the usual provisions available to faculty emeriti. Which is usually not many rights and privileges. Why not provide for a professional position for a president who has served well and wishes to stay on the campus, or on a campus within a system? Why not a lesser administrative position, if qualified? Why not a professorship where appropriate? Perhaps a professorship in one's academic major, but be careful of calling the professorship "Distinguished." This can be a meaningless title, outrage scholars, and not truly describe someone who was not, really, a distinguished president! Provision of such a professional position is even more crucial if term of service is limited! Why not develop some dignified way to accommodate someone who served well? Even industry creates chairman of the board positions for some successful company presidents. After an investment in recruitment/appointment, provision of job experience, why waste this resource with the added and hopefully humane concern of not knowing where former presidents go? There is no president's graveyard (like the elephants have).

5. Salary

The salary considerations for a president who leaves the presidency but who accepts a professorship or lesser administrative position at the same college (or within the system) should be established before the separation demands it. Frequently the salary becomes a reduction of a twelve to ten months obligation, but the Minnesota Public College and University System has made it 80% of one's final salary. This appears to be too "rich" a procedure for SUNY. There should be a recognition of the salary levels of the campus professors or other administrators which can be used as a principle to determine a former president's salary.

6. Dismissal

I believe it is evident that local campus trustees have a significant role and voice in the separation decisions which determine whether a president leaves or remains. In a large state system, other bodies and persons may have the authority to legally dismiss, but if this occurs without the right to due process for the president, or direct participation by local trustees as a full board, you should rise up in indignation. Trustees by their nature are people of social and political prominence who are charged with a stewardship of one campus -- and -- who knows the campus development and quality of presidential leadership better? If legislation is required, move to have it introduced! You may also need to protect presidents from vindictive trustees who seek to have the president removed.

I urge all here to renew your pledge to protect your college and its executive officer from arbitrary and capricious action from any source. Of course, the president, as your executive officer, will provide leadership for this task, but he/she cannot depend upon himself, nor should he/she, to defend alone his own leadership record from any external or intramural machinations!

I commend to your attention an AASCU brochure entitled Guidelines for Conditions of Employment for College and University Presidents, and the American

Association of University Administrators' published statement, Professional Standards for Administrators in Higher Education. These publications can assist you in gaining an excellent understanding about college and university administration and the chief executive, the president. Let me end with the concluding statement in the AASCU Guidelines:[1]

> "These recommendations...will assist in attracting and retaining high quality chief executives of colleges and universities. This, of course, enhances the development of these unique academic institutions. A president or chancellor who knows the rights and responsibilities of the office, understands the requirements for ethical relationships, accepts the need for accountability of leadership through a systematic evaluation, and has available professional support for renewal of leadership requirements will serve with a commitment to the position which assures the quality and mission of the institution."

I believe that college and university leadership, as expected of and carried out by presidents, is in a critical mode. We are at a crossroads where greater accountability for one's stewardship is expected, and greater demand for forthright and candid presidential action is required.

Many mistakes in decision making could be dispersed or go unseen during the heady periods of plenty when the key was growth with a simple belief that more was better. Those who may have been willing to "stay on board the train" and disperse largesse are now "getting off at the next station," but the engineer must still keep the train on the track and moving forward with less "fuel." Mistakes

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[1] American Association of State Colleges and Universities. Washington, D.C., 1975.

in judgment may be more serious and visible today with scarce resources and adversary relationships abounding.

Barry Munitz[1], in his report of March 1976, sums it up well:

> "A crucial factor in finding and keeping strong leaders will be the enhanced stability that a more sophisticated selection and review process can provide and a better understanding of the matrix of forces within which a president must work. The danger at the moment is that our finest people will be driven away by crude assessment devices. Our challenge is to strengthen the person and the office."

The state of the art of presidential evaluation is in its beginning stages. You have a challenge of no small order. Your Association is to be complimented on your theme for the conference. It shows you have identified most of the problems. I believe it is necessary that you go on with the task.

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[1]Munitz, Barry. Presidential Evaluation: An Assessment of Institutional Leadership. Workshop report for The Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education, pp. 1-40.